

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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McGarvey 202/343-5634

MARINE OTTER INCLUDED UNDER THE MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ACT OF 1972

The Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to add the marine otter (Lutra felina) of Chile and Peru to the list of species designated as marine mammals for purposes of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Species which are listed under the Act are subject to the restrictions and protective provisions of the Act.

This proposal was published in the Federal Register on June 16, 1977.

Two subspecies of the marine otter are recognized: the first, from southern Chile, is slightly darker brown on the surface when compared to the one from northern Chile and Peru.

This species inhabits the coastal waters along the west coast of South America from central Peru south to Cape Horn, Chile. Nothing is known about its seasonal movements. It occurs mainly in the coastal region, but it is also known to ascend rivers to at least 650 meters above sea level.

Darwin found this otter abundant in the Chonos Archipelago and among the islands off the southwestern shores of Tierra del Fuego. It has been greatly diminished in numbers since Darwin's time, but in 1923 the Chicago Field Museum Expedition found it to be common along the southern end of Chiloe Island, Chile. Nothing is known about numbers of the marine otter along the northern coast of Chile, but in Peruvian waters the population

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is estimated to be between 200 to 300. In the Cape Horn and southern Tierra del Fuego region this species has been practically exterminated. One specimen was collected at Wollaston Islands, Tierra del Fuego, about 25 years ago.

Unlike the sea otters of the Northern Hemisphere, marine otters belong to an entirely different group that includes river otters. Presumably they developed from stream-dwelling animals after becoming isolated in coastal areas when the middle part of South America's west coast became drier.

The Director's judgment is based on information summarized above and the fact that the Marine Mammal Commission has independently recommended to the Director that the marine otter be listed. Although the marine otter is listed as an endangered species and is therefore protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, this proposed listing would afford the species additional protection.

Interested persons are invited to participate in this rulemaking by submitting written comments to the Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036. Comments should make reference to file number 18-02-09. The Service will attempt to acknowledge receipt of comments, and all written comments received on or before July 19, 1977, will be considered by the Service before final rulemaking activity is initiated. The proposal contained in this notice may be changed in consideration of comments received.

Comments received will be available for public inspection between 7:45 a.m. and 4:15 p.m., Monday through Friday, in Suite 600, 1612 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

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